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3 0 WILD COTTON ERADICATION IN FLORIDADECLASSIFIED Carl Sahasrabudh,
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There are more than 900 colonies of wild cotton plants, aggregating 17,000 acres, in eleven counties in south Florida. These colonies of wild cotton plants are located in swamps and jungles. Many are located in remote and almost inaccessible areas and some can be reached only by boat. The climate is warm with heavy rainfall and cotton plants will grow into small trees and produce fruit the year round if not destroyed. Wild cotton seeds, unlike domestic cotton seeds, are small and very hard and will germinate during all seasons after being on the ground up to fifteen years. Wild cotton seeds are disseminated by birds, animals, and water. There is also a limited spread by wind.

At one time most wild cotton colonies were heavily infested with the pink bollworm of cotton. The degree and area of these infestations have been reduced, until at the present time there is a light but general infestation in Dade and Monroe Counties. However, 75% of all wild cotton land is within the infested area.

Both the wild variety and domestic types of cotton plants are grown in dooryards in southern Florida as ornamentals. These also are host to the pink bollworm.

The purpose of the eradication program is to eventually eradicate the pink bollworm in south Florida by the elimination of wild cotton and dooryard cotton plants. While this is being done it is essential to hold pink bollworm infestations to the lowest possible degree to prevent spread to domestic cotton-producing areas in the Southeastern States, or to wild cotton colonies now free of pink bollworm infestations.

The pink bollworm once spread from wild cotton in south Florida to domestic cotton fields in Florida and Georgia. These infestations were eradicated at considerable cost to the Federal Government, the States involved, growers, and processors. This major cotton pest is capable of rapid spread if control and eradication measures are not promptly applied. A general infestation in domestic cotton producing areas would probably reduce cotton production a great extent. Additional damage by the pink bollworm in areas where the boll weevil is established would probably make the cost of cotton production prohibitive to many growers.

Wild cotton plants develop from seed throughout the year and will produce mature fruit within a few months. Eradication work is expedited during the period October to May when weather conditions are favorable for such work. The most satisfactory means of destroying wild cotton plants is by pulling them out by the roots. It is not feasible to use chemicals to destroy them. All mature fruit is carefully collected and destroyed to prevent seed from falling to the ground. This prevents seedlings from developing and also kills any pink bollworms which may be present in the fruiting forms. Areas between known colonies are scouted for random plants.

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Eradication work is done by permanent employees as supervisors and assisted by Letter of Authorization and Wage Board temporary employees. Workers are quartered in camps and on houseboats except in areas where they can be transported daily from towns adjacent to wild cotton colonies. The operation of camps and houseboats involves the employment of cooks and helpers, the purchase of many items of food, ice, and fuel, the transportation and storage of fresh water, and the generation of electricity for light and power.

Field work in connection with wild cotton eradication is rather difficult due to several factors. As stated above, most colonies are in isolated areas in swamps and jungles. Workers are transported by vehicle and boat or both as far as possible but it is often necessary for them to walk long distances to reach the location of wild cotton plants. It is often difficult to reach locations worked from boats, due to much shallow water. Vegetation in the work areas is usually quite heavy, and includes poisonous and thorny plants which sometimes injure workers. During favorable weather workers must walk through much mud and water. If there are unseasonable rains, mosquitoes develop in great abundance and are very troublesome, and sometimes forces suspension of work. Rattlesnakes and other snakes are found in considerable numbers. Alligators and crocodiles have been encountered in limited numbers, but with a few exceptions, have not been troublesome.

It is necessary to make systematic surveys for dooryard or ornamental cotton plants in all the towns and cities in the southern part of Florida, which involves a methodical examination of thousands of premises. This work is usually done during the season when it is not possible to do wild cotton eradication work due to climatic conditions.

A large number of fruting forms collected from wild cotton and dooryard cotton is examined to determine the location and degree of pink bollworm infestations.

Inspectors of the Florida State Plant Board cooperate by removing or reporting ornamental cotton plants found while inspecting various premises, groves, and nurseries. During 1953 the Plant Commissioner of the Florida State Plant Board promulgated a regulation prohibiting the planting and production of cotton, including dooryard or ornamental plants, in nineteen counties located in the southern part of Florida. This regulation has expedited the removal of dooryard cotton plants when found.

More than one-half of all wild cotton land is within the boundaries of the Everglades National Park. Eradication work within the Park area is done in accordance with a memorandum of agreement approved by the two agencies.

Statement revised by
W. E. Conn, Project Leader,
June 4, 1954.





